



News Release

For immediate release: October 26, 2012

(12-157)

Contacts: Tim Church, Communications Office
Donn Moyer, Communications Office

360-236-4077
360-236-4076

Prescription drug tracking system illegally accessed

Suspected identity theft under investigation

OLYMPIA — This week Washington’s Prescription Monitoring Program sent letters to 34 people whose records were illegally accessed by someone who used a physician’s identity. The doctor’s personal and professional information was used to set up a fraudulent account in the statewide system. The state Department of Health urges health care providers already using the system to review their account to make sure it hasn’t been used fraudulently. Prescribers without accounts are being asked to set up their own accounts to reduce the risk of illegal access.

The Prescription Monitoring Program oversees a database with information on controlled substance prescriptions. Controlled substances are drugs regulated by federal and state law because of their potential for abuse. Health care providers authorized to prescribe these drugs use the online system to see their patients’ controlled substance prescription history. By viewing these prescriptions, health care professionals can better coordinate patient care and help prevent overprescribing, dangerous drug interactions, and drug addiction.

State health officials immediately deactivated the account when they learned it was fraudulent. The illegal account had been used to put the information of 34 patients into a format that can be downloaded. The patients and their prescribing providers have been notified and law enforcement is now investigating the case.

“Maintaining the privacy of personal health information is a priority for the Department of Health,” said Assistant Secretary Karen Jensen. “Our Prescription Monitoring Program and our information technology security officer are working together to see what else can be done, look for ways to improve security, and prevent future attempts to create fake accounts.”

The patients involved have been urged to contact health insurers and care providers to verify that no unauthorized services have been used under their names. Providers are encouraged to safeguard their professional and personal identifiers to help avoid this problem. They're also being urged to register for the program to help protect their practice and patient health records.

More than 10,000 health care providers in Washington use the online system. Other groups, including law enforcement and health professional licensing boards, can request information to help prevent controlled substance misuse, fraud, and diversion.

The Prescription Monitoring Program collects records for all controlled substances from practitioners and pharmacies that dispense these medications. Prescription drug misuse is a national and local problem. It's caused an alarming growth in overdose deaths, hospitalizations, admissions for substance abuse, and other non-medical use.

In Washington, deaths involving unintentional prescription pain medication overdoses increased nearly 21-fold from 24 in 1995 to 490 in 2009. In the past decade, the numbers of hospitalizations for prescription pain medication dependence and abuse have doubled.

The [Department of Health website](http://www.doh.wa.gov) (www.doh.wa.gov) is your source for *a healthy dose of information*. Also, [find us on Facebook](#) and [follow us on Twitter](#).

###